

Lighting of Fiber Optic Backbone Brings Broadband to the Town of Nickelsville (September 1, 2006)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Nickelsville Fiber Optic Project Lighting Event

September 1, 2006

Nickelsville, Virginia

I am pleased to join this morning with officials from Scott County and the Scott County Telephone Cooperative to participate in a truly worthy celebration. Today, we formally light the new Nickelsville Fiber Optic Network, a project which will enable the provision of broadband services, including affordable high-speed Internet access, digital television and telephone services, to households and businesses in the Town of Nickelsville and the surrounding areas. In addition, a new public Internet access site connected to the fiber optic network has been established here at the Nickelsville Community Center.

Approximately ten years ago, I encouraged local governments throughout the Ninth District to find a means of deploying broadband networks so that affordable high-speed Internet access would be available to businesses and residents throughout our region. My goal in making this recommendation was to set our region apart in comparison to other rural areas of the nation, to make us more attractive than the typical rural region to industries looking to expand their operations into new locations, and to create technology-based jobs for Southwest Virginians.

Today, I am pleased to note that many of the communities in our region are making great strides in the deployment of broadband networks, and the success which we celebrate today in Nickelsville is a shining example of the outstanding work that is being done in many of our localities.

Using a \$586,737 federal grant, which I secured from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency, and more than \$500,000 from the Telephone Cooperative, SCTC has installed nearly 22 miles of fiber optic cable over the "last mile" from its Internet backbone to the homes and businesses in the Town of Nickelsville.

The Telephone Cooperative has deployed fiber optics to the premises of 392 homes and 34 businesses in the Nickelsville area as well as Nickelsville Elementary School, Nickelsville Community Clinic, the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department, and the Community Center.

Splicing and testing of the new network will be complete in approximately three weeks. Broadband Internet services are now available to residents in parts of the Town, and television and telephone services are expected to be available in the near future.

The Scott County Telephone Cooperative will operate and maintain the new telecommunications network, and a variety of Internet, telephone and television packages will be available to residents and businesses in the Nickelsville community. Interested individuals may contact the company's customer service line at 276-452-8000 to obtain more information about the package offerings or to sign up for any of the new services.

In addition to the new broadband services available to residents and businesses in Nickelsville, a portion of the federal grant funds have been used to establish a computer laboratory and public Internet access site at the Nickelsville Community Center, where we gather this morning.

Construction on the computer lab is now complete, and the 10 new computer workstations are now online. The lab will be staffed by an employee of SCTC who will offer basic computer assistance to users of the access site, and it is expected that the new computer lab will open to the public on Tuesday, September 5, 2006. The lab will be available to the public Monday-Friday from 1:00 PM to 7:00 PM and on weekends by appointment.

I am pleased to note that our celebration today marks just one of our efforts to deploy high-speed Internet and other broadband services throughout Scott County. Last year, I participated with Scott County officials and the Scott County Telephone Cooperative in the lighting of a fiber optic network for the community of Duffield. The network was constructed using a nearly \$500,000 federal grant, which I helped the Cooperative to obtain, to deploy a similar fiber optic network in the Duffield community. New telecommunications services are now available to Duffield residents and businesses. Additionally, \$11 million in federal funding, which I announced in 2004, is being used to deploy DSL Internet service in Clinchport, Dungannon, Fort Blackmore, the Williams Mill area of Gate City, and the surrounding areas of the County.

Just as first canals, then railroads and then highways were the major arteries of commerce in earlier eras, in the 21st Century, access to broadband will be a defining feature of economic success for rural communities. Step by positive step our expanding fiber optic infrastructure is assuring that Southwest Virginia's communities will be at the center of economic opportunity.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize several individuals who have been instrumental in the success which we celebrate today.

I want to commend Bill Franklin, Executive Vice President and Manager of Scott County Telephone Cooperative, John Kilgore, President of the Telephone Cooperative Board of Directors, and the other members of the Board for the excellent service they are performing for the residents of Scott County. SCTC is helping to lead Scott County into the 21st Century, and I thank them for their commitment to the prosperity and continued development of Southwest Virginia.

I also want to recognize Joel Williams, President of Mid-South Consulting Engineers, and I thank him for lending his expertise to the broadband project in Nickelsville.

Patrick Carey, General Field Representative for the Rural Utilities Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provided immense support to those involved in obtaining the federal funding for this project.

I also want to thank Skip Skinner, former Assistant Director for LENOWISCO Planning District Commission and the current Wise County Administrator. Skip provided excellent assistance in writing the grant application for this project.

Ron Flanary and his excellent staff at LENISWISCO have provided vision and leadership in expanding the telecommunications infrastructure in the region, and I thank Ron for that critical role.

Finally, I want to recognize my District Director, Laura Lee, for the work she has performed for this project. I place a high priority in my office in obtaining successes much like the one we celebrate today, and Laura's work is vital to our efforts to deploy new broadband technology throughout Southwest Virginia.

The Nickelsville fiber optic network which we officially light today marks another major step forward in our work to improve the quality of life for Southwest Virginia residents. I want to commend all here for the success of this project and offer a special congratulations to the residents and business owners who will benefit tremendously from the new broadband telecommunications services that are now available to them.